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TAGS: PGOV NATO MK

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: NATO SECGEN ENCOURAGES NAME RESOLUTION

REF: SKOPJE 262

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) During his April 21 visit to Skopje, NATO SecGen de Hoop Scheffer pressed his interlocutors to resolve the name issue with Greece before July 9 in order to allow Macedonia to join Albania and Croatia in signing their NATO accession protocols on that date. He urged them to continue the name talks under UN Special Negotiator Nimetz, and offered his "good offices" to help facilitate discussions with Athens. GOM interlocutors said they remain committed to the name negotiations, despite early elections scheduled for June 1, and to resolving the name issue quickly, but "not at any cost." End summary.

NATO SECGEN ON THE BUCHAREST SUMMIT

¶2. (SBU) In the wake of the Greek veto of Macedonia's NATO bid at the Bucharest Summit in early April, NATO SeGen de Hoop Scheffer met in Skopje April 21 with President Crvenkovski, Prime Minister Gruevski, Minister of Foreign Affairs Milososki, Minister of Defense Elenovski, and name negotiator Dimitrov. MFA State Counselor Zoran Dabik told us during a debrief April 22 that the SecGen initiated the short-notice visit, during which he told interlocutors that he understood their frustration over the Bucharest Summit outcome. Scheffer explained that NATO's solidarity principle had prevailed at Bucharest, however, with a number of Allies supporting the Greek position. Resolving the name issue in the shortest time possible was therefore essential to Macedonia's membership prospects.

RESOLVE THE NAME, BOARD THE ACCESSION TRAIN

¶3. (C) The SecGen urged his interlocutors to negotiate in earnest, and to try to resolve the name issue before July 9 so that Macedonia could join Albania and Croatia on that date in signing the NATO accession protocols. If Macedonia missed the NATO train, de Hoop Scheffer suggested, it would also miss its chance for EU membership. That could only result in a dark future scenario for Macedonia. The SecGen noted that he was "just a messenger for 26 Allies," and acknowledged that the name dispute is an asymmetrical one in which Greece has the advantage.

GIVE NIMETZ A CHANCE

¶4. (C) Alluding to early parliamentary elections scheduled for June 1 in Macedonia (reftel), Scheffer called on political parties not to abuse the name issue for partisan gain, which he suggested would have a negative impact on the name negotiations. He also pleaded with his interlocutors to "give (UN Special Negotiator on the name) Nimetz a chance," and not to squander the momentum that had built up in the pre-Summit name talks. According to Dabik, Scheffer offered his "good offices" to help facilitate discussions and said he was ready to visit Skopje again if that would be helpful in getting to a solution of the name issue before July 9.

GOM PURSUING CONTINUED NAME TALKS

¶5. (SBU) President Crvenkovski told the SecGen that Macedonia would pursue a solution to the name issue in continued talks, but that resolving the issue would also depend on Greek flexibility. Noting that the government, following the recent dissolution of parliament, now had "less legitimacy," he said that Macedonian leaders were nevertheless determined to resume name discussions. Support from the four main political parties in Macedonia would, he said, give any decisions on a compromise proposal needed legitimacy.

¶6. (SBU) Crvenkovski reminded the SecGen that Macedonia had accepted the Nimetz name proposal just before the Bucharest Summit. Greece had chosen, however, to veto both Macedonia's NATO membership and also its right to choose a new name for international use. He told Scheffer that he believed the Greeks were buying time until new presidential elections in the U.S., after which they would revise their negotiating strategy. Macedonia remained willing to negotiate flexibly

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to reach a solution, but not at any price.

¶7. (SBU) PM Gruevski told Scheffer the Nimetz talks would proceed with Macedonian participation. Gruevski said he expected a new parliament to be in place by June 28, and a new government to be formed by late July. At the same time, he was optimistic, according to Dabik, that the name issue could be resolved by July 9. Macedonia would negotiate, but would not take any step that would "endanger our national identity," Gruevski continued. The PM added that he would insist on a referendum to confirm any compromise solution reached.

¶8. (C) FM Milososki was "tougher" in his remarks, according to Dabik. He emphasized to the SecGen that Macedonia was living through a turbulent historical period, with both Kosovo and Serbia on its borders. He argued that the Greek veto at Bucharest had concealed an attempt to deny Macedonians' identity, and to prevent the country's integration into NATO and the EU. He told Scheffer he hoped the NATO allies would send a strong signal to Greece to be more flexible in the name talks.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) The SecGen's visit was helpful in maintaining pressure on the Macedonian leadership to continue the name negotiations, despite upcoming early elections, and in reassuring the government and public that the SecGen firmly supports a resolution of the issue that will allow Macedonia to receive an invitation and join the accession protocol signing on July 9. It also revealed, however, GOM leanness of Greek motives and concerns as to whether Athens is truly committed to a resolution of the issue, or is merely biding time to position itself to "up the ante" after the November elections in the U.S. End comment.

MILOVANOVIC